

# ALONSOVILLE VOICE

IT'S A BEAUTIFUL DAY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

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Cover photo "Autumn Leaves Jazz Concert" by Dennis Gray

## Rick Bogdan: Tanks for the Memories

By David Bolton



*Out of 150 G.I.s, Private Bogdan being awarded “trainee of cycle,” Advanced Infantry Training, Fort Polk, Louisiana. Bogdan had a terrible hangover celebrating the end of AIT.*

He was born an orphan in Missouri. The parents were not young... father was 51 and mother 43. She spent her pregnancy in Willows, a home for unwed mothers. When the state of Missouri unlocked the records in 2012, Rick was finally able to connect with blood relatives. He learned that he had a grandfather and great grandfather in Liechtenstein, born in 1864 and 1836.

At the age of one month, he was adopted by Polish parents from Chicago. When he was 5, his mother was sickened with tuberculosis. “She was bedridden,” said Rick in a recent interview. Every day at 5pm, Ray, his father, would call from work. One afternoon she did not pick up the phone. It rang and rang. The boy entered the bedroom. His mother was dead.

Suddenly single, Ray decided to put the grieving child in Saint Joseph Military Academy in La Grange, IL. For the next two years, first and second grade, Rick lived in “the Barracks. It was like the Army”... had to make the bed exactly right, wear a uniform properly and stand in rigid formations. In drilling ceremonies for “army people,” if the instructor didn’t like the posture, he’d hit the back of

*“You do what you gotta do.”*



*First grader Ricky plays pepper with Pepper, the dog*

the knees with a swagger stick. Getting out of line in class would earn a whack of the ruler across the knuckles. For the most part, the nuns liked the lad. The boy knew his Latin from daily mass. They chose him to crown Mary, Queen of May.

Every Friday his father picked him up in his big sedan. Inevitably, they would go to Algaeur's, a famous Chicago restaurant. "Sometimes a woman was with Ray. He drank Manhattans. I got the maraschino cherries." Eventually, his father remarried and the family, including a stepsister, moved to the North Shore of Chicago. Ray was doing well in business. They had a house next to the 13<sup>th</sup> hole on the golf course. Now in public school, Rick was in sports heaven. It didn't matter if his new stepmother didn't

like him. He had baseball and golf. With Jack, his best friend, they built a baseball field on the acre that their homes encompassed. Home plate was on hard-packed sand. The boys put in a mound and played "pitch and hit" from dawn to dusk. "Sometimes we'd climb the fence, clean up golf balls and sell them. At the end of the day, we'd hit chips and practice getting on the 13<sup>th</sup> green, playing a par 3 to come back." Young Rick also witnessed two golfers getting killed by lightning in separate incidents. He was all too familiar with death.

In '65, he entered Southern Illinois University. According to Playboy Magazine, it was the number-one party school. Bogdan fit right in. But his luck did not hold. His stepfather came down with TB and was in a sanitarium. There was no money for school. Says Rick: "I would go to school for a quarter and then work." He ran a food truck to the dorms. He flipped hamburgers at Winky's, "48 hamburgers at once. I'd come home smelling like Winky's." He worked as a janitor: "I was assigned to a female dorm. I would come in, announce 'man on the floor' and clean the shitters. You do what you gotta do."



*At parade rest.*

In the meantime, he majored in journalism and advertising with aspirations of becoming “a newspaperman.” For a year and a half, he was president of the Sigma Pi fraternity and drank a lot of beer. Between quarters at school, his draft status changed from 2S to 1A. In the '69 draft lottery, his number was 310. No trip to Vietnam for Bogdan.

He never did earn that degree at Southern Illinois. The degrees would come later. His girlfriend, Ellen Macarthur, did graduate and became a teacher. In '71, he married her.

In July of 1975, Bogdan was four years into a career in retail. He was in the executive training program for Henry C. Lytton and Co. and “learning the clothing biz, from the mills to the stores.” Working at the flagship store on State Street in Chicago, he “earned his stripes as a salesperson, assistant buyer and then buyer of men’s outerwear. Then the Coles family sold the 13 stores to a conglomerate.” One of his closest friends was shifted to California for “a promotion... less than two months earlier, they fired his ass.” Time to pursue a different line of work.

### **We're in the Army Now**

Rick Bogdan’s autobiographical novel, *Grunts, Gramps & Tanks*, captures the moment:

*“Willett strode into the U.S. Army recruiting station... he told an astonished recruiting sergeant he wanted to enlist and serve in the infantry.”*

One small snag: Bogdan hadn’t mentioned this career change to Ellen. They now had a baby boy. He knew if he told her ahead of time, she’d talk him out of making this radical change. He had been enamored with the Army since military school. The Army would give him more stability. Better than the quicksand of retail.

Three days passed. Over brats and beer on their apartment porch in Evanston, he revealed that he had quit his job and joined the Army. Ellen asked if he had lost his mind. Bogdan had 10 days to make things right before he shipped off to Fort Polk, Louisiana. He handed over his \$2500 signing bonus. He told her that after boot camp, he’d be stationed in Fort Benning, Georgia, for officer candidate school. He assured her it would all work out, that he’d be home by Christmas. Her demeanor softened.



*Rick with his son Kyle at Fort Benning.*

Few places are more miserable than southern Louisiana in the summer. The oppressive heat and humidity can break a man's will, perfect weather for Basic Combat Training. Only Bogdan and one other man were college-educated. By the time he turned 28 in August, the cutoff point for enlistment, he was known as "Gramps." Most of the other would-be soldiers were 18 or 19. Despite the differences, Bogdan got along. "The drill sergeants were merciless." He didn't mind. He started with "a reasonable level of fitness" and within weeks felt a difference in his overall strength. Most of the men in the company were becoming soldiers. You learn to adapt.

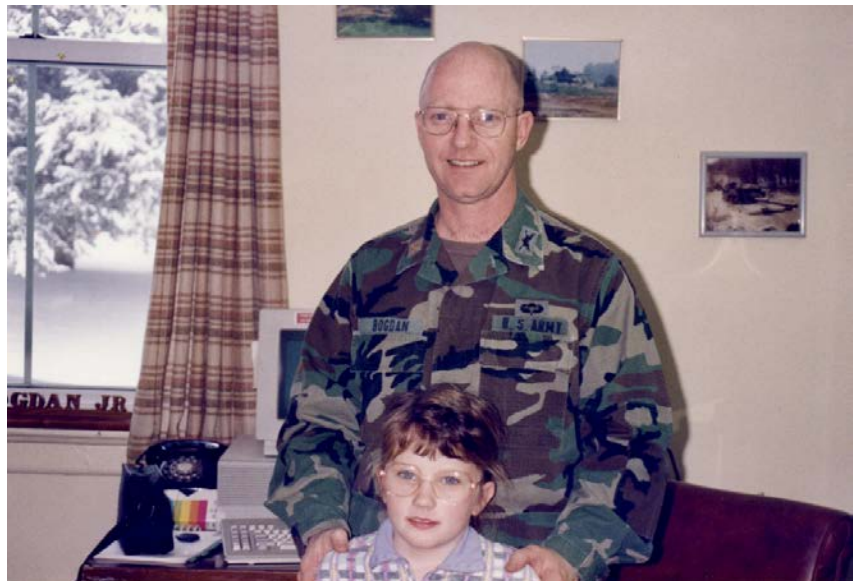
By October, PFC (Private First Class) Bogdan was in AIT (Advanced Individual Training) and living in open-bay World War II barracks. He looked forward to completing AIT and becoming "an infantryman." During a combat training exercise, Bogdan saw his future:

"Five M-60 tanks rolled into the very ground the men of B Company had been defensively prepared" with deep trenches and target sightings of the enemy. Rick was in one of those trenches when the tanks passed. In the cupola of the third tank, a lean and mean soldier had a cigarette in his mouth. His left hand held a can of Coca Cola. The tank commander raised his left arm, holding the can of coke in a mock salute and took a long swig." Right then, Bogdan knew he wanted to be "a tanker."

Eventually, the family was reunited. Not that there weren't snags along the way. The rat in the toilet of the rental house wasn't exactly a high point. A year passed. He applied for OCS, Officer Candidate School. In October Specialist Bogdan received an official Department of the Army envelope. His hands were shaking when he opened the letter. His marriage might be riding on this. "Non-select." What kind of word was that?

"Now what?" asked Ellen. He said he planned to "ride this out." He had a three-year commitment. After discharge, he could try his hand again at retail. They would survive. Ellen called the predicament "a nightmare." She said she was disappointed in him. The next six months were tough. To ease their financial strain, he worked part-time at a Texaco station, pumping gas, cleaning windshields, sweeping up, whatever it took to avoid living paycheck to paycheck.

Six months later, thanks to some key officials who recognized Specialist 4 Bogdan's potential and talent, he was accepted into OCS in March of 1977.



*With Kyle at Fort Leavenworth*

**Officer Bogdan**

*“Looking back, it might have been the most fun I had in the Army.”*

As a newly minted armor officer from OCS, Lieutenant Bogdan earned his wings jumping five times (once at night) at 3000 feet from a 4-propeller C-130 Hercules. He found the experience to be an “intoxicating combination of thrill and fear.” On the ground, however, once again he was a witness to death. In the last jump of the day, two airborne officers, Vietnam Vets, leaped at 20,000 feet from the C-130. One chute failed to open. The officer smashed into the landing zone turf 200 meters away. Turned out, it was Bogdan’s former platoon leader who splattered on the ground, a man the lieutenant admired and respected... made him want to go home and hug his wife and son.

Life improved when he and Ellen bought a house in Copperas Cove, Texas, a town bordering massive Fort Hood. His son was now four years old. Here he reported to his first commissioned officer duty assignment. During tank gunnery, he would be gone 10 to 12 days. Annual tank gunnery, a competition at the highest level, “could make or break any tanker, officer or non-



*Captain Bogdan in his Mess Blues, celebrating the conclusion of the U.S. Marine Corps Amphibious Warfare School, Quantico, Virginia*

commissioned officer.” Over the next 10 days, he had to earn the respect of his crew by making the right decisions. Everything depended on his sighting the targets and ordering when to fire. “Boom! The M60 tank’s 105-millimeter main gun lurched the 49-ton tank.” It was his first target hit. Many more would follow. At the end of the competition, he was congratulated on his outstanding performance as a tank commander and platoon leader. Second Lieutenant Bogdan now relished “Sir.” He had earned it.

Three months later, in June of ’78, Bogdan’s 3<sup>rd</sup> platoon would be “center mass” in a fire power demonstration for President Jimmy Carter, a two-hour show involving attack helicopters, artillery, mortar fire, and infantry. Tanks and armored personnel carriers had the responsibility of direct hits. One problem: during the rehearsal, the near-miss order failed to reach Bogdan. “Looking back, the demonstration may have been the most fun I had in the Army,” like something out of MASH. From a mile away, he and his men destroyed most of the junk cars and trucks on Blackwell Mountain. He caught hell for it but didn’t care... lot more fun pulverizing those targets than plastic targets on the gunnery range. And the Jimmy Carter show? He and his men were “impressed and proud” seeing the combined power of the U.S. Army. Lieutenant Bogdan gave the final command: “Gunner, HEAT, truck.” In less than a second the truck exploded, creating an explosion fit for a president.

Though they never fired a shot in wartime, the preparations for a Soviet invasion of Europe were thorough and ongoing. Bogdan spent time in Germany where he and his men were greatly respected by the former Nazi tankers, who insisted that they had fought the Russians, not the Americans. Back home, Bogdan’s prowess as a tank commander became legendary during war games. His rigorous preparation against “West Pointers,” who went by the book in defensive positioning, often ended in a surprise attack. He listened to his men and cultivated an open exchange of ideas, such as climbing a steep slope to outflank the competition. It seemed impossible until PFC Tomkins suggested climbing in reverse. There was only one gear in reverse. They zig zagged a tank up the slope to see if the plan would work. “Gun it good!” Bogdan ordered at the lip. There was a small difference between the 49-ton tank making it to the top or toppling it backwards. All the torque the tank could muster propelled it over the lip, and then gravity brought it slamming into the plateau. This bold maneuver would lead to a rout of the competition.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

*Though we travel the world over to find the beautiful, we must carry it with us or we find it not.*

*~ Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Meanwhile, in '81 he earned a Bachelor of Arts at State University of New York (Excelsior University) and a master's degree in systems management at the University of California in '83, the same year his daughter was born. Shortly thereafter, Captain Bogdan was selected to attend the U.S. Marine Corps Amphibious Warfare School (AWS), the highest honor so far in his career. His performance there met or exceeded the Marine Corps standard. At the conclusion of the nine-month school, Colonel Farrell, commandant of AWS, offered to transfer him to the Marines. All he had to do was sign the dotted line. Bogdan, though honored by the selection, turned him down. The reason? The Army probably had more tanks in the Georgia National Guard as there were in the whole Corp. His heart was with tanks.

In '92, the Army was downsizing. After 17 years and three months of active duty, Bogdan accepted the buy-out and joined the Army Reserves and went to work for the Department of the Army, serving as a military analyst and editor. He and his wife divorced in '98. In '05, he retired when he reached the mandatory retirement age of 58 and left the Army Reserves. He entered as a private and retired as a Lieutenant Colonel. He commanded at the company and battalion level. In 2012, he retired from the Department of the Army as a GS-14.



*On the move*



Along the way, he met Teresa, a nurse. “It was a serendipitous meeting. We both were on Match.com... never connected. I was into the military, sports and motorcycling. Teresa? Art, photography and music. BUT, a glitch in a pilot site, Chemistry.com, weirdly connected us and one thing led to another. And here we are.” They moved into Alonsoville in June of '06. Why Alonsoville? Partly because the English Tudor revival style reminded him of officer quarters. Once an officer, always an officer. They were married in October of '06.

To this day, whenever Rick sees a tank, he marvels at how he did that.



*Rick and Teresa enjoying life together.*



## Once Upon a Time

People would rake their leaves into the gutter and burn them. I miss the smell of burning leaves on fall Saturdays.

~ Daivd R. Stoll, *Keswick History Notebook*



# Congratulations

Don Berger is the winner of the 6th James Tate International Poetry Prize presented by SurVision, a literary publisher in Dublin. The prize is named after the esteemed Pulitzer Prize- and National Book Award-winning American poet (1943-2015). Don studied with Tate at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. In spring 2024 SurVision will publish *Please*, the collection of poems that earned him the award. Here's a poem from the book:

There was no way to tell whether what  
I'd write would mean anything, to sleep  
with my soul on, I don't remember  
a lot but it was tremendous and  
still seems like it, the sunlight and trees  
not begging for description, time not  
worried about where wind comes from, yes  
to a hundred per cent not ninety  
nine point nine anymore. I love  
how they told you how long to keep your  
teabag in, that when you write enough  
*Break off the first branch that brushes against  
your hat on your way home and bring it  
to me--the legend of the ones*  
who couldn't stop laughing. Don't forget loose,  
the word that means close to your tongue, don't  
feel like you have to be saying something.



## The Alonsoville Story: a Past Perspective

*Recently I had the pleasure and honor of interviewing 88-year-old Nancy Ratchford, who grew up in 401 Wingate. ~ DB*

Nancy's father, George Tracy Bertsch, moved to Baltimore from Iowa when he was a young boy. When he was 17 and attending Poly High School, his teacher sent some of his student's war cartoons to the Sun Paper. The newspaper paid him during high school to draw cartoons. Upon graduation, Johns Hopkins University offered George a scholarship, which he turned down as he needed to help support his mother. Being of German descent, he displayed his bona fides as an American with his anti-Kaiser cartoons. He would end up as vice president and general manager of the newspaper.

Nancy's mother hailed from the Forest Park neighborhood. The family owned the Tickner Funeral Home. In 1932, George and Charlotte bought one of the new homes being constructed around the circle. Over a two-month period, the young families filled the circle homes on Wingate. The same year, Betty, Nancy's oldest sister, was born and added to the number of new babies on the circle. Nancy was born in 1935, followed by her twin sisters, Ann and Barbara.



*8-year-old Nancy with her dog, Mike*



*Nancy in white, behind her sister Betty*

## Game On

“It was a homestyle neighborhood,” said Nancy. The fathers worked and the mothers stayed home with the children. Young Nancy was free to “run everywhere.” At the appointed time, she and her friends had to go home for a nap. The Ma and Pa train passing in the alley signaled their return to the circle, sidewalks and Wingate Road. “Watch out for the ball!” An elderly couple across the street wouldn’t give it back. “They suffered on Halloween.

“Children didn’t need much and created their own fun. It was the Depression. On hot days, we ran through the sprinkler.” At the circle, games reigned: marbles, croquet, hide-and-go seek. Twice a month a monkey grinder appeared with a monkey on his shoulder. While the monkey did tricks, the grinder grinded music and sharpened scissors and knives. There was also “chalk night” and driveway shuffleboard. “On weekends,

families did yard work and took turns carrying yard waste to the alley. The children got to ride home in empty wheelbarrows. The folks sat out on their porches around the circle and watched the kids play.”

The 4<sup>th</sup> of July picnic was “a big deal” on Wingate Road and the surrounding area. “We decorated bikes with cards between spokes and added crape paper.” Sound familiar? Children in wagons banged pots and pans as they paraded up to the Wagner and Wagner Drug Store. “We were treated to an ice cream cone or dixie cup.”

Nancy and her sister had the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor bedroom. Across the driveway were four children, one girl and three boys in the Freeze family. “My mother disliked seeing the Freeze family concrete the back yard for a basketball court. Balls bounced day and night.” In winter, the concrete yard was frozen over, perfect for skating. Meanwhile, Nancy and her neighbor “hooked up a walkie talky” as well as a rope out of the third-floor windows of each home. Children shot notes back and forth in a tin can.

“We had the freedom to be there because they all knew us.”

## A Culture of Sharing

In warm months, the circle neighbors took turns each Friday to cook, “making the kitchen hot,” starting at 10AM. The coal oven would stay on all day, cooking for neighbors: casseroles, pot roasts, potatoes and more. “And, in case you need sugar, take some from the Bertsch house.” Coupon books of grandparents found their way to other hands. If a family was sick, a meal train helped out, not only with food, but also entertainment and carpooling to school. If a child needed shoes, help was there.

An element of trust permeated the neighborhood. “Gleason and Lutz, the local grocery store, would literally drive right up Wickford Road, open the back door and leave the groceries on the kitchen table.” During World War II, young Nancy witnessed everyone uniting in the war effort. “We had dark blinds pulled down and very heavy velvet drapes. We would all gather in the living room during drills and stay put until the all-free siren went off.

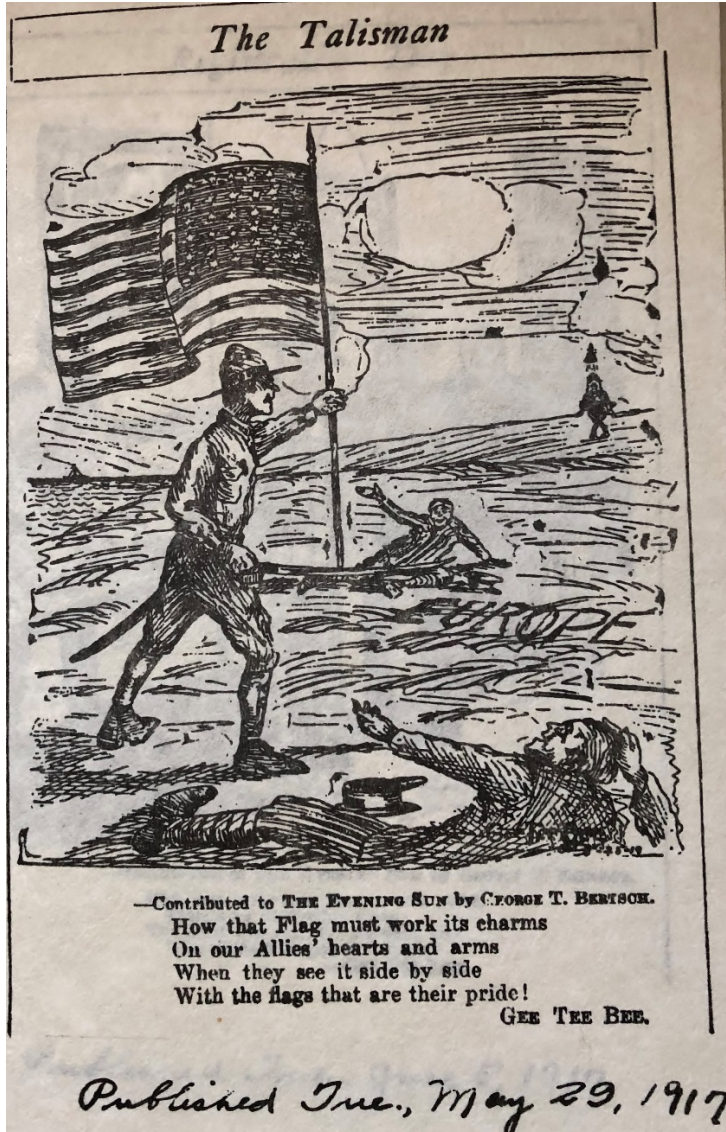
“Daddy was an air warden. He went up and down the street, knocking on doors if any light was showing.” The challenge bonded families. They would sit for several hours in the dark and play games or tell stories. Mommy and Daddy helped pass the time. Nancy taught herself to make collages from newspapers in the dark.

Behind 401 Wingate Road, near Linkwood Road, an empty lot was turned into a Victory Garden. “Daddy hooked a bracket into the wall in the Bertsch’s yard so the children could climb up to the garden.” Coming off the wall, Nancy might travel via the wide garage roofs, jumping over two neighbors. “It was a huge garden. No deer could get to it... swiss chard, lima beans, tomatoes by the bucket.”

Daddy had interesting friends. H.L. Mencken was a regular at the Bertsch household. He might do a reading or discuss what was written in the paper. Another visitor was photographer Aubrey Bodine. His original prints remain in the family. Cartoonist Jonathan Yardley and musician Oswald Steinwald were next door neighbors on Sedgewick. “Johns Hopkins named a building after him,” she said proudly.

As Nancy grew, there were “fun places to go,” such as Candy Andy penny candy; Drop Stitch studio, featuring expensive





women and children's clothing; Wagner and Wagner Drug Store and soda fountain; and, a shoe repair, a source for rubber heels, a necessity for hopscotch. "We had the freedom to be there because they all knew us."

Nancy walked the train tracks with her friends on the way to Roland Park Elementary. Later on, she would go to Eastern High School. Nancy was with her father in the Sun office when Truman was elected in '48. Later, the Sun office provided Daddy with a television, a tiny black and white. Nancy invited all her friends to watch Howdy Doody. Many of the friends, "to this day," remain close. "Rusty Stewart, at Wickford and Cold Spring, married Ann McClary on Sedgewick and Cold Spring." Now they live in the same retirement home as Nancy.

The 1960s changed the neighborhood. Television and AC had an impact. "People got old. In a three-year period everyone moved out and young people moved in." In 1984, Nancy's family sold the house and moved to a retirement home.

Computer problems? Word driving you crazy?  
 Doug Miller, an Evergreen resident, can help.  
[443-226-0863](tel:443-226-0863)/[doug@processbydesign.net](mailto:doug@processbydesign.net)  
[www.processbydesign.net](http://www.processbydesign.net)

Recently, her grandson, a Hopkins student, and his mother drove by the Wingate house. Linda, Nancy’s daughter, arranged for her to see the house. “It brought tears to my eyes seeing the neighborhood. I wish my children had been there. It’s a nice place to raise a family.” Nancy wondered what changes had been made to the house itself. She was pleased to find the same glass doorknobs and original window sills. The layout of the rooms was the same, no major reconstruction. Some of the rooms even had the same paint color!

“We are thrilled the special home is now appreciated and cared for by Timothy App and his wife Theresa! Thank you!”



*You can go home again*

## **Featured Dog in the Neighborhood**



### **LUCKY POOLE**

Lucky was a rescue from Louisa County, VA and adopted through BREW.

Lucky lives with his human Kathleen on Wickford Rd and is keeping an eye out on the neighborhood!



## News & Notes

Many thanks to John Dean who put together the Autumn Leaves Concert.

KIA meetings are held at 7pm on the first Monday of the month. We welcome broad participation.



### Calling all thespians and playwrights!

#### The 20<sup>th</sup> annual Variations Project

Baltimore's original ten-minute play festival  
Strand Theater, from 2pm to 5pm, Saturday, January 13

Scribble on our graffiti wall, sit for a video confessional, and hobnob with local writers and artists. Audiences of 2023's Variations on The End voted "COURAGE" as next year's theme, and this party is where we'll generate source material to inspire 2024's authors. That includes YOU! The Variations Project encourages participation from all levels of writing experience. We look forward to a fun afternoon with new friends and old.

After the party, it's time to start writing. Our submission deadline will be March 1. Following the deadline, we'll hold readings of all the plays we receive, with the authors present for discussion and to receive feedback. Writers will then have the opportunity to make revisions before final selections are made. Shortly after the readings, we will announce the group of roughly 8 to 12 plays which will be produced on stage—and start rehearsals! VARIATIONS ON COURAGE will appear on stage next summer (dates and location are TBD). Jalice Ortiz-Corral, who helmed this year's Variations on The End, will direct again. Actor friends: please note that these cold submission readings also serve as auditions for the production ensemble. If you're interested in performing with us, they're your best shot. And they're fun! As always, Rapid Lemon Productions pays all their artists a small stipend. Playwrights whose work is chosen for the summer show will receive a small royalty.

Those who miss the party, but still want to take part, have no fear: we will post images and videos from the event on our website shortly afterward.

The Variations Party is free and open to the public. Street parking is available on Harford Road and in nearby blocks. Questions? email [VariationsProject@gmail.com](mailto:VariationsProject@gmail.com)





## One More Word

In the previous article, there was mention of a “Culture of Sharing” in the new neighborhood. It was the Depression. The young families came together through entertainment, cooking, planting, and helping those in need. The Second World War also drew them together.

In many forms, this culture still exists in Alonsoville. Go through the calendar: New Year’s Eve, fireworks and the drop of the crab; the Memorial Day picnic; Pumpkin Carving; the lighting of the tree, and other random events. The circle is the heartbeat of the neighborhood.

Alonsoville people are big hearted. When a certain dogwalker broke her ankle on the ice, neighbors were there for her. Get Covid and you might find pea soup at the door. Someone needs a ride to the dentist? No problem.

Makes me proud to be part of this culture.

